

Contributions.

A SYMPOSIUM.

THE GREATEST HINDRANCE TO THE PROGRESS OF THE BRETHREN CHURCH.

J. A. MILLER.

To the careful observer it is quite patent that there are at the present time some very grave difficulties to be met. Difficulties indeed which have assumed the proportion of positive hindrances to our progress. I shall not venture to indicate the *greatest* of these. It would require an intellect keener than mine to make the analysis necessary to disclose the most potent element inimical to the progress we ought to make.

It may not be amiss to indicate at least a few of these hindrances at this point. This must be done not in a spirit of fault-finding, but with the purpose of discovering the real situation in order that as far as possible we may act intelligently in the solution of these difficulties and the removal of hindrances.

To the broad-minded, unselfish man whose whole soul is all aglow with the supreme purpose and thought of his life there is no unimportant consideration. Everything, however remotely related to his work, is important. And so it must be with every member of the Brethren church whose heart and purpose is not divided. Whatever hinderance we meet will demand the attention of the man who sincerely desires to see the work progress.

This being true I make bold to indicate what appear to me to be some of the hindrances in our way.

1. We have failed to use the means at our command.
2. We have failed to adapt ourselves to the *spirit* and *needs* of the times.
3. We have failed to support our institutions.
4. We have failed to hold and enlarge the ground acquired.
5. We have permitted kindred interests to become divided and thus weakened.
6. We have given our congregations inadequate pastoral care.

I have not in the foregoing indicated any hindrances that lie along the spiritual side of our church life. I am well aware of the fact that along that line we fall far short. Yet I believe as a people we have maintained an excellent standard of moral and spiritual life and growth. I have mentioned the difficulties above stated because they seem to lie very largely on the material side of our church life. Our spiritual life, its growth and activities, its field of action is very largely depend-

ent upon the so-called material or secular side of religious activity.

Now it appears to me that we are able in a measure at least to remove the hindrances indicated. I am far from saying that a panacea can be found in any one proposed solution. I do however believe two things. These I shall here briefly indicate.

1. As society is at present constituted and as the work of the church is done hindrances along the spiritual side of our progress must largely be overcome—*a*, by the pulpit; *b*, by the literature; and *c*, by the educational institutions.

2. As to the difficulties of the nature before indicated, they, it seems to me, can be successfully dealt with and overcome by a carefully devised and wisely applied method in our church work. They arise, as a glance will show, out of the lack of a system. I should say an efficient, and therefore a wise and comprehensively constructed system is wanting. We have a system now. Some very good brethren are opposed to a system. A system is simply the way a certain work or class of work is done. The way our state conferences are held and the work coming before them is done is a system. The way we hold our National conferences and do the work constitutes a system. A system is the way a thing is done however crude and unsatisfactory it may be. I believe in order, a wisely devised order. I am in favor of the best possible means being employed to teach to the world the whole Gospel. I believe the experience of the past and the wisdom of the church can guide aright in this matter.

G. W. RENCH.

Of the many hindrances I will put down without hesitating, *the lack of discipline*, as the greatest. By lack of discipline I mean the want of the proper care of the congregation. I am one who does not believe that the lack of care of our churches is due to the need of a better system than the one which we have. God gave us the system which we have and I believe and act upon the belief that it is all right. I am aware that this system does not suit some, but what has God ever given us but what is right? Failure to care for the churches is not because of the need of a better system, but because,

1. God's plan is ignored.
2. Ignorance of the plan, or
3. The neglect of duty in carrying out the plan or want of courage to do so.

We often hear glowing sermons on "The Neglect of so Great a Salvation," when the preacher himself is the very best

living example of such neglect. Sometimes we get a stirring sermon on "The Man-fearing Spirit," when everyone knows that the preacher would faint if he would have to tell Brother A. that he must quit his lying. Such persons are nearly always sure to come to conference crying for *system*. "O, give us a plan for governing the church," they cry, until the air is well nigh blue. They imagine that if they only had a little machine all painted red and marked in gold letters OUR System that they could go on studying Latin and it would do the rest.

If a church is to be a real force in a community, if its appeals to men and women to embrace its teachings are to be of any weight, then its moral statue must be high. It cannot be high with very many bad men and women in it. God's plan is "to withdraw yourself from every brother that walketh disorderly." "Disorderly walking" is defined, even by the same authority. *How to withdraw* is explained (1 Cor. 5) This is to be done, 1. To save the good name of the church. 2. To save the individual. 3. To save the community. You can't keep men and women out of a church that *does right*. You can't get them into a church that *does wrong*. Cut loose from sin my brother. Help your church to get free from bad talkers, bad leaders and quarrels in general, and good people will take their places.

J. L. GILLIN.

It is not easy to criticize justly and helpfully. The office of critic is more often essayed than any other, and the most abused. Yet, criticism is necessary and should be done properly or not at all.

Lack of consecration stands first in my view of the hindrances to our progress. It is a broader term than we are used to think. But I shall not define it. I shall simply show what it means.

A consecrated man is a holy man. Not a "goody-goody" man, nor a sad or long-faced man necessarily, but a *whole* man. Not holy only on Sunday, nor in church affairs, but every day and in every affair of life. Every duty is religious. Every calling that is right is sacred. The division of duties and things made by labelling some sacred and others secular is false and productive of evil. All work, thought and word legitimate to man is religious. Every faculty of mind, heart and body is the subject of redemption and intended for consecration to the Lord. A partial consecration is a fiction. "No man can serve two masters." If a man is intelligently consecrated he does all things for the glory of God. Hence, a consecrated man is a holy man.